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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 4084
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1495
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ SEP 5288
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 9814
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 0001
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 2603
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2019
TAGS: [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: SHINING PATH SHOOTS DOWN HELICOPTER IN THE VRAE

Classified By: Ambassador P. Michael McKinley for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Presumed Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso, SL) forces downed a Peruvian air force (FAP) MI-17 helicopter yesterday, killing its pilot and co-pilot. This was the latest example in a recent spate of deadly attacks in the Apurimac-Ene River Valley (VRAE) attributed to the SL, including four attacks there in the last ten days. The latest casualties bring the total of military deaths in the VRAE to around 40 in the last 16 months. Some 25 policemen have reportedly been killed in the same period, though mostly in the Upper Huallaga valley (UHV). Senior GOP officials, including President Garcia, have maintained that the up-tick in violence is SL's response to the military's more aggressive incursions into its drug-producing territories. Some local analysts, however, contend that the attacks reflect SL's increased capabilities and reach in the VRAE -- and the GOP's continued lack of political will and structured engagement to meaningfully tackle the problems in the VRAE. End Summary.

September 2 Incident

¶2. (C) According to some initial press accounts, the following incident took place on September 2 near the town of Sinaycocha, Santo Domingo de Acobamba District, Huancayo Province in Junin Region: At around 5 PM, one of two Peruvian Air Force MI-17 helicopters on the same mission was struck by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) on its tail rotor, as it attempted to extract three soldiers who had previously been wounded in a fire-fight in the area. These reports indicate that the pilot and co-pilot were subsequently killed by SL small arms fire after the helicopter had crash-landed. The fate of any other passengers who may have been on board the craft is unclear and similar sources suggest that soldiers from the original patrol may also be missing or surrounded by SL forces. We note that other Embassy contacts dispute this version of events and contend that the helicopter was probably brought down entirely by small arms fire (probably 7.62 mm machine gun) and that its crew was killed before the craft hit the ground.

Other Incidents

¶3. (C) Other armed clashes have taken place in the VRAE in recent days. For example, on August 26, two soldiers were killed in two separate encounters with presumed SL forces near San Antonio de Carrizales, in Huancayo Province. According to military sources, as many as four SL members may

have been killed during the second clash, but this information was unconfirmed, since the SL maintains the practice of removing its dead from the battlefield. Also last week, three soldiers were wounded in a fire-fight with SL in the same area and on August 31, two more soldiers in the VRAE were wounded by SL rifle fire.

Comment:

14. (C) The immediate fall-out from the September 2 Sinaycocha incident included a call from vice-president Giampietri to purchase armored helicopters for the VRAE. The downing of helicopters is a rare occurrence in the VRAE, but bound to happen sooner or later according to our military contacts. Peruvian Air Force Major General Antonio Karacic (Please Protect) recently told Emboffs that SL has the money and contacts to purchase MANPADS if it wanted to. But he claimed that SL was dissuaded from buying MANPADS because its narcotrafficking partners feared that the introduction of sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons into the VRAE theater would "attract unwanted attention which would be bad for business." End Comment.

MCKINLEY